

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L GABORONE 1986

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: ELAB BC
SUBJ: GOB HOME AFFAIRS PERMSEC SPEAKS TO BFTU COUNCIL

REF: GABORONE 1520

SUMMARY: GOB PERMANENT SECRETARY FOR HOME AFFAIRS, G.W. MATENGE, RECENTLY DRESSED DOWN BOTSWANA FEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS (BFTU) COUNCIL OVER INTERNAL DISSENTION WITHIN COUNCIL. HE THREATENED TO WITHDRAW GOB RECOGNITION OF BFTU AS LABOR SPOKESMAN AND WARNED FOREIGN LABOR REPS NOT TO TAKE SIDES IN DISPUTE. END SUMMARY

1. AT HASTILY CALLED BFTU COUNCIL MEETING JUNE 17, HOME AFFAIRS PERMSEC G.W. MATENGE WARNED FEUDING COUNCIL MEMBERS THAT GOB MIGHT WITHDRAW ITS RECOGNITION OF BFTU AS REPRESENTATIVE BODY OF BOTSWANA'S TRADE UNIONS. MATENGE COMPLAINED OF HAVING RECENTLY RECEIVED LETTERS FROM TWO DIFFERENT PEOPLE CLAIMING TO BE BFTU GENERAL SECRETARY. MOREOVER, GOB HAD EXPERIENCED PROBLEMS IN ORGANIZING BOTSWANA'S DELEGATION TO GENEVA ILO CONFERENCE BECAUSE BFTU COUNCIL COULD NOT AGREE ON LABOR REP. MATENGE TOLD COUNCIL THAT GOB NOW
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BELIEVES DISSENTION WITHIN BFTU GENERAL COUNCIL IS DAMAGING LABOR MOVEMENT IN BOTSWANA.

2. MATENGE ALSO CRITICIZED AALC (U.S.) AND FREDERICH EBERT (FRG) LABOR ADVISORS FOR ALLOWING THEMSELVES TO BE DRAWN INTO POWER STRUGGLE WITHIN BFTU COUNCIL. HE SUGGESTED THAT AALC AND EBERT REPS WITHDRAW FROM INVOLVEMENT WITH BFTU UNTIL

COUNCIL MEMBERS CAN OVERCOME THEIR DIVISIONS AND RECONSTRUCT UNITED TRADE UNION MOVEMENT.

3. MATENGE URGED COUNCIL TO HEAL ITS RIFT BY CONSTITUTIONAL MEANS. HE SUGGESTED THAT FEDERATION'S CONSTITUTION PROVIDES PROCEDURES FOR OUSTING LEADERS WHO HAVE LOST CONFIDENCE OF WORKERS BUT THAT COUNCIL MEMBERS HAVE RECENTLY RESORTED TO UNCONSTITUTIONAL MANEUVERS, THEREBY SPLITTING BFTU COUNCIL AND CONFUSING WORKERS. IN CLOSING, MATENGE APPEALED TO BFTU COUNCIL TO HEAL ITS RIFT BEFORE BOTSWANA'S ILO DELEGATION RETURNS IN EARLY JULY AND REPEATED HIS WARNING THAT RECOGNITION OF BFTU MIGHT BE WITHDRAWN IF SPLIT IS NOT HEALED.

4. COMMENT: MATENGE'S SPEECH WAS FIRST OVERT GOB INTERVENTION IN DISPUTE BETWEEN BFTU FACTIONS LED BY RAILWAY WORKERS LEADER SETLHARE AND BANK WORKERS LEADER TLHAODI. MATENGE'S CALL FOR CONSTITUTIONALISM WAS ATTEMPT TO AVOID APPEARANCE OF TAKING SIDES BY DECLINING TO REFER TO EITHER CONTESTANT AS BFTU GENERAL SECRETARY. HOWEVER, REFERENCE TO CONSTITUTIONALISM ON BALANCE PROBABLY TILTS TOWARD BFTU GENERAL SECRETARY SETLHARE SINCE TLHAODI'S CLAIM TO DESIGNATION AS GENERAL SECRETARY RESTS ON DECISION OF RUMP BFTU COUNCIL MEETING AT WHICH ONLY THREE OF SEVEN CONSTITUENT UNIONS WERE REPRESENTED.

5. GOB IS CLEARLY DISSATISFIED WITH PROPENSITY OF FOREIGN LABOR ADVISORS TO TAKE SIDES IN BFTU INTERNAL SQUABBLE. WE BELIEVE
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MATENGE'S WARNING TO STAY CLEAR OF FACTIONAL INFIGHTING WAS AIMED PRIMARILY AT FREDERICH EBERT REP HELFER WHO REPORTEDLY HAS SIDED WITH TLHAODI FACTION; HOWEVER, HIS CRITICISM MAY ALSO HAVE INCLUDED FORMER AALC REP SMITH WHO REPORTEDLY LEANED TOWARD SETLHARE FACTION. MATENGE EMPHASIZED THAT GOB STILL VALUES FOREIGN ASSISTANCE TO BFTU, BUT HE ALSO PUT HELFER AND NEWLY ASSIGNED AALC REP JOHNSON ON NOTICE THAT GOB INTENDS TO MONITOR THEIR ACTIVITIES.

6. ALTHOUGH MATENGE THREATENED COUNCIL WITH WITHDRAWAL OF RECOGNITION OF BFTU AS REPRESENTATIVE BODY OF BOTSWANA'S TRADE UNIONS, AALC REPS TAYLOR AND JOHNSON BELIEVE HE MADE LITTLE PROGRESS IN SETTling BFTU SPLIT. WE ARE INCLINED TO AGREE WITH THEIR JUDGMENT THAT MORAL JAWBONING IS UNLIKELY TO BE EFFECTIVE UNLESS PRESIDENT KHAMA HIMSELF CHOOSES TO INTERVENE. GOB MAY BE ABLE TO EXERT SOME LEVERAGE IN THE DISPUTE THROUGH ADMINISTRATIVE CONTROLS OVER TRADE UNION ACTIVITIES, BUT IT WILL BE RELUCTANT TO ACTUALLY WITHDRAW RECOGNITION OF BFTU. IN GOB VIEW, EVEN A BFTU FRACTURED BY INTERNAL DISPUTES IS PROBABLY BETTER THAN DEALING INDIVIDUALLY WITH A PROLIFERATING VARIETY OF INDIVIDUAL UNIONS.
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